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OLDER AMERICANS ACT AMENDMENTS OF 2000

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Statement of HON. RON PAUL OF TEXAS

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- Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take this opportunity to express my opinion on the Older Americans Act Reauthorization (H.R. 782) and explain why I must vote against this bill. Of course, I support efforts to ensure America's senior citizens have access to employment, nutritional and other services; however the federal government is neither constitutionally authorized nor competent to provide such services.

- Under the tenth amendment, the federal government is forbidden from interfering in areas such as providing employment and nutritional services to any group of citizens. Thus, when the federal government uses taxpayer funds to support these services, it is violating the constitution. In a constitutional republic, good intentions are no excuse for constitutional carelessness.

- Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, by involving itself in these areas, the federal government has politicized the offering of these services as well as assured inefficiencies in their delivery--inefficiencies that would not be present if the federal government respected its constitutional limits and allowed states, local communities and private citizens to provide these vital services to seniors. For example, one of the most contentious areas of this bill is the funding that goes to private organization to provide employment services. Many of these organizations are involved in partisan politics, and, because money is fungible, the federal grants to these organizations make taxpayers de facto underwriters of their political activities. As Thomas Jefferson said: 'To compel a man to furnish funds for the propagation of ideas he disbelieves and abhors is both sinful and tyrannical.' This 'sinful and tyrannical' action is inevitable whenever Congress exceeds its constitutional limitations and abuses the taxing power by forcing citizens to support the charitable activities of congressionally-favored organizations. One reason for this is that federal funding encourages these organizations to become involved in lobbying in order to gain more federal support. These organizations may even form alliances with other advocacy groups in order to build greater support for their cause.

- When social services are nationalized, there is inevitably waste and inefficiency in the distribution of the services. This is because when the government administers social services the lion's share of those services are provided to those with the most effective lobby or those whose Congressional representative is able to exercise the most clout at appropriations time. While I applaud the efforts of certain of my colleagues on the Education and Workforce Committee to direct resources to where they are truly needed, particularly Mr. Barrett's efforts to bring more resources to rural areas, the politicization of social services will inevitably result in some areas receiving inadequate funding to meet their demand for those services. I have little doubt that if these programs were restored to the private sector those areas with the greatest concentration of needy seniors would receive priority over those areas with the most powerful lobby.

- There are ways to ensure that seniors have opportunities for productive lives without violating the constitution and politicizing charity. One way is to repeal the social security earnings limit, which punishes seniors who continue to work in the private sector. Another way is through generous tax credits and deductions for taxpayers who support charitable organization designed to provide services to individuals. Finally, the best way to aide the nation's seniors, and those who are about to be seniors, is to stop raiding the nation's social security system to finance other unconstitutional programs. This is why the first piece of legislation I introduced this year was The Social Security Preservation Act (H.R. 219), which

would ensure that social security monies would be spent on social security. I was also a cosponsor of the legislation to end the earnings limit, which passed the House of Representatives this year. I am also cosponsoring several pieces of legislation to allow people to use more of their own resources to help the needy by expanding the charitable tax deduction.

- Mr. Speaker, several years ago, when people still recognized their moral duty to voluntarily help their fellow humans rather than expect the government to coerce their fellow citizens to provide assistance through the welfare state, my parents were involved in a local Meals-on-Wheels program run by their church. I remember how upset they were when their local program was forced to conform to federal standards or close its program because Congress had decided to take control of delivering hot food to the elderly. It is time that this Congress return to the wisdom of the drafters of the Constitution and return responsibility for providing services to the nation's seniors to states, communities, churches, and other private organizations who can provide those services much more effectively and efficiently than the federal government.